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DEPARTMENT FOR EAP, DRL

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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [CH](#)
SUBJECT: HUMAN RIGHTS: CHINA CHRISTIAN COUNCIL LEADER GAO
YING DISCUSSES RELIGIOUS EXCHANGES, HARMONIOUS SOCIETY,
CHURCH REGISTRATION

Classified By: Acting Political Internal Unit Chief Dan Kritenbrink. R
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SUMMARY

11. (C) Exchanges with United States religious institutions are extremely valuable for Chinese Protestants, Nanjing Union Theological Seminary Vice President and China Christian Council (CCC) Standing Committee member Gao Ying told Poloff during a March 15 meeting. Now is an especially opportune time for Christians in China, Gao said, because PRC authorities have affirmed religion's role in building a "harmonious society." Protestants nonetheless face numerous obstacles, including a severe shortage of pastors. Gao described three types of unregistered Protestant groups: those working with the CCC to register, those that accept in principle government registration but reject any affiliation with the CCC and those that oppose registration altogether. China, Gao said, will have to grapple with denominational proliferation that stretches beyond the CCC's capacity to manage. End Summary.

RELIGIOUS EXCHANGES HELP CHINESE PROTESTANTS

12. (C) Poloff met with Nanjing Union Theological Seminary Vice President and CCC Standing Committee member Gao Ying on March 15, following her trip to the United States to participate in the Fuller Theological Seminary's March 6-8 "China Forum on Theological Education." The Fuller Forum addressed various issues, challenges and potential educational partnerships between Protestant organizations in the United States and China. Gao, a self-described protege of Bishop Ding Guangxun, attended the forum with about a dozen other leaders of Nanjing Union and the CCC. She said Ding, who is over 90 and no longer "what he used to be," has entrusted her with responsibility for running day-to-day operations at Nanjing Union.

13. (C) Gao emphasized the value of religious exchange between Protestant organizations in the United States and China because they help address critical deficiencies in the capacity of Chinese churches to meet the needs of parishioners. Gao said that there are many more "spaces of opportunity" for cooperation between United States and Chinese religious organizations than in the past. Cooperation already exists in some areas but much untapped potential remains. Gao said that the CCC fits well with United States Protestant institutions that embrace an "ecumenical, liberal theology" focusing on "the transformative power of religion." Gao said the Fuller Seminary has evolved away from conservative evangelical

emphasis on "hell and damnation," which did not match CCC theology because it did not mesh well with "socialist optimism."

RELIGION'S ROLE IN A "HARMONIOUS SOCIETY"

¶4. (C) Gao said that now is an especially exciting and opportune time for Chinese Christians. In contrast with the Chinese government's stance toward religion during the Cultural Revolution, the Chinese government now recognizes the important role of religion in building a "harmonious society." Gao said the CCC tries to fulfill this role by promoting harmony among the following three relationships in Chinese society: 1) between Protestantism and other religions such as Islam, 2) among various Protestant "churches" and 3) between religion and larger society. Gao added that she believes Christian ethics must play a larger role in a rapidly evolving Chinese society.

REMAINING CHALLENGES

¶5. (C) Chinese Protestants still face numerous challenges, according to Gao. Registered churches need better leadership at all levels, but especially at the pastoral level where the ratio of pastors to parishioners is only 1:7000. Nanjing Union is developing a one-year correspondence course for lay leaders, which is intended to build on the strong lay tradition among Chinese Protestants. Exchanges with United States institutions help Chinese counterparts learn improved methods of carrying out pastoral duties. Gao said exchanges also help Chinese counterparts improve curricula and other tools for promoting Christian education.

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CHURCH REGISTRATION, DENOMINATIONAL PROLIFERATION

¶6. (C) Gao described various types of Protestant groupings in China, using Beijing as an example. Beijing has less than twenty officially recognized protestant churches. However, there are more than 200 registered "meeting points," or places of worship. There are also more than 2000 unregistered meeting points. Of these, groups at more than 300 meeting points are working with the CCC to become qualified for registration, but have not yet done so. Next, a small percentage of groups refuse registration for "political reasons," often because they reject any role for regulation by the government. Most of the more than 2000 unregistered groups would be amenable to registration in order to "become legal," except that they are staunchly opposed to any affiliation with the CCC that might cause them to cede control over their own religious affairs. Gao said many within this grouping fear that affiliation with the CCC will erode their unique "community life" or compromise their doctrinal distinctiveness.

¶7. (C) The government would like to be able to "deal with" all Protestant organizations through the CCC, said Gao. But Gao, who holds degrees from the San Francisco Theological Seminary and Berkeley's Graduate Theological Union, said that the tendency toward a proliferation of Protestant sects within China mirrors denominational proliferation in the United States. The CCC has adopted a "principle of mutual respect" in dealing with denominational differences, affirming that it will "appropriate and learn from" differences conducive to building "a united Chinese church." Despite the effort to accommodate different sects within a "united church," Gao said the CCC and the Chinese Government will need to grapple with denominational proliferation that exceeding the CCC's capacity to manage.

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